



**EFL TEACHERS' USE OF MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES IN TEACHING VSTEP SPEAKING TO STUDENTS LEARNING TO REACH LEVEL 3 OF VSTEP (B1) AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR PRACTICES**

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**Abstract:**

Motivation plays a vital role in English language teaching and learning, especially in the development of speaking skills. This study, therefore, aims to examine teachers' use of motivational strategies (MS) in teaching VSTEP speaking to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1) and the factors influencing their practices. Data were collected through observations and questionnaires with two and 54 teachers respectively. The findings reveal that teachers in the private sector demonstrated a range of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking to students who aspired to reach Level 3 (B1) in VSTEP. This study also reports five factors influencing the use of MS including teacher-related, student-related, school-related, MS-related and testing factors. This study contributes to the understanding of EFL teachers' use of motivational strategies in teaching speaking skills within the context of VSTEP Level 3 (B1). The findings offer insightful views for teachers and administrators, informing the development of effective teaching practices that foster motivation and enhance English language proficiency.

**Keywords:** motivational strategies, VSTEP speaking, influential factors

**1. Introduction**

In the Vietnamese context, teachers and students get engaged in English language teaching and learning to pass the national graduation English exam or to reach Level 3 of VSTEP (B1), which is to meet the requirements of the English language proficiency for university graduation (Q. N. T. Nguyen, 2019). Level 3 of VSTEP signifies an intermediate level of proficiency where learners can function social and work situations involving the four language skills (Q. N. T. Nguyen, 2018; T. P. T. Nguyen, 2018; Truong, Samad, & Phan, 2021). Therefore, attaining Level 3 necessitates a certain degree of linguistic

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accuracy, fluency, and proficiency, which places a strong emphasis on speaking skills. Thus, teachers' use of motivational strategies plays an essential part in driving students' motivation in accomplishing these goals.

The use of motivational strategies has received considerable attention in the literature on student motivation to learn and classroom participation (Bui, 2007; L. V. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Tran, 2019). These studies reported different implementations of MS to keep their students motivated and engaged in classroom activities. However, most studies on the use of MS within the Vietnamese context are mainly based on self-reports from teachers and students within high school contexts. Few studies examined the use of MS in contexts where teachers taught students to reach Level 3 of VSTEP English proficiency (B1).

This paper, therefore, reports the use of MS by EFL teachers in teaching VSTEP speaking skills to students learning to reach Level 3 of VSTEP (B1) and the factors influencing teachers' practices in this context. The research questions that guided the reports in this study were:

- How do teachers use motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking skills to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1)?, and
- What factors influence teachers' practices of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking skills to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1)?

## 2. Literature review

The following section reviews the literature on key terms: motivational strategies, Level 3 of VSTEP and VSTEP speaking, student motivation and speaking, and factors influencing the use of motivational strategies.

### 2.1. Motivational strategies

Motivational strategies (MS) play a crucial role in fostering learner motivation and engagement in language learning. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory distinguishes between autonomous motivation, driven by intrinsic factors, and controlled motivation, driven by extrinsic factors. This theory offers guidance on promoting autonomous motivation and minimizing controlled motivation through the use of appropriate MS. Dörnyei's (2001) taxonomy categorizes MS into four dimensions, focusing on creating basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. These strategies aim to establish a supportive classroom environment, cultivate strong teacher-learner relationships, enhance goal-orientedness, and boost learners' self-efficacy.

The use of motivational strategies has attracted the interest of numerous researchers (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, & Ratcheva, 2013). These studies support the notion that teachers play a crucial role as motivational factors in the learning process. For instance, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei

(2008) found a positive relationship between teachers' use of motivational strategies and students' motivational behaviors, such as their engagement in class activities and willingness to participate. Additionally, research suggests that students' perceptions of their teachers' use of motivational strategies are positively associated with their overall motivation levels (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008).

An empirical study conducted by Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, and Ratcheva (2013) explored the impact of teachers' use of motivational strategies on students' motivation. The researchers employed a custom-designed questionnaire to assess the motivation level of the participating students, while the teachers in the experimental group were provided with a guide containing specific techniques to implement in the classroom. The findings indicate a significant increase in students' motivation as a result of teachers' use of motivational strategies.

In the Indonesian context, Astuti (2016) conducted a multiple case study to investigate how teachers use MS and the impact of these strategies on students' motivation in the high school context. Data collection techniques are semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and stimulated recall, and from the students through focus group interviews. The findings indicate that teachers employ their strategies to stimulate their students' motivation, which profoundly influences their students in classroom practices. Moreover, strategies influencing the motivation reported by students are categorized into five domains, namely teachers' classroom behaviors, encouraging classroom atmosphere, choice of learning resources and activities, the effectiveness of English, and the way feedback was offered. However, there are no significant differences in factors influencing students' motivation among the groups.

Lee and Lin (2019) examined the use of motivational strategies beyond Dörnyei's classification and the factors influencing English teachers' adoption of these strategies. The research involved 22 English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers based in Hong Kong. Qualitative analysis was conducted on reflective journal entries, interview responses, and classroom observations. The findings indicate that while most of the strategies reported align with Dörnyei's recommendations, two additional macro strategies, namely routine teaching activities and the incorporation of authentic materials, were employed. The primary driving factor behind the use of these macro strategies was a concern for their feasibility.

In Vietnam, Bui (2007) investigated the use of motivational strategies in English classrooms by one hundred and fifty teachers in the Mekong Delta. A quantitative technique using a motivational strategy questionnaire was used to collect data. The findings reveal a list of twelve often-used strategies that EFL teachers employed to promote students' motivation. They involved creating a pleasant and supportive environment, offering positive feedback, natural and sensitive behaviors, clear guidance and assurance for the tasks' achievements, encouragement and appraisal for students, sharing-interaction-cooperation encouragement, appropriate task challenges, comparison avoidance, consideration for learners' progress, using unexpected elements

to trigger learners' curiosity, assigning group work, encouraging mistakes as the natural process of learning. However, this study only applied questionnaires to collect data.

Tran (2019) conducted a descriptive study to explore seventy-one high school teachers' use of MS, the influencing factors, and their perceptions of these factors. Three instruments used in this study include observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The findings indicate the different use of MS in speaking lessons in terms of its frequency. These included showcasing desirable teacher conduct, acquainting students with the importance of the second language (L2) along with associated values and attitudes, fostering group unity and adherence to shared standards, delivering constructive feedback, cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere, implementing task-related approaches, and providing incentives. Moreover, factors influencing the use of MS include teacher-relatedness, student-relatedness, MS-relatedness, and school-relatedness. In general, participating teachers' perceptions of their use of MS in speaking lessons were recorded at high levels.

## **2.2. Level 3 of VSTEP (B1) and VSTEP speaking**

Levels 3-5 of VSTEP speaking skills require students to have competencies in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communicative strategies (T. P. T. Nguyen, 2018; Truong et al., 2021). As its name suggests, VSTEP is an acronym for Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency, which is a six-level English proficiency test according to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) to assess and certify English language proficiency of students in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing across different institutions in Vietnam (equivalent to A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2). Therefore, teachers should help their students familiarize themselves with the VSTEP framework and exam format by involving them in practicing conversations, expressing opinions, producing extended discourse, and narrating events with coherence and organization. To develop and assess these skills, teachers can use various task types such as role-plays, interviews, debates, and presentations. The assessment criteria include accuracy, fluency, appropriateness, coherence, and organization, and rubrics can be used for evaluation and feedback (Ton, 2021). Levels 3-5 speaking test consists of three tasks: social interaction, discussion, and topic development (Q. N. T. Nguyen, 2018). These tasks assess interaction, discussion, and problem-solving skills. The test focuses on assessing the test-taker's ability to communicate effectively in routine situations. Once individual students achieve a certain level of VSTEP, they can demonstrate their language proficiency for academic purposes and professional opportunities and ideals.

## **2.3. Student motivation and speaking**

Several studies have shown a positive relationship between motivation and speaking. Noels, Pelletier, and Vallerand (2000) highlighted that a positive motivational climate in the classroom can increase learners' willingness to communicate and improve their speaking ability. Dörnyei and Clément (2001) found that motivated learners tend to

perform better in speaking tasks, as motivation increases their willingness to communicate and engage in spoken interactions.

Anxiety is another important factor to consider. Research indicates that anxiety can have a negative impact on speaking ability and learner motivation. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) observed that students with high levels of anxiety had lower motivation to learn and speak a foreign language. Similarly, Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) found that such types of students experiencing anxiety with English while learning English were less motivated to participate in speaking activities in class. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the influence of anxiety on students' motivation and speaking ability. In addition, they should know when and how to provide support and guidance to help students manage their anxiety effectively (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Clément, 2001).

#### **2.4. Factors influencing the use of motivational strategies**

Factors influencing the use of motivational strategies by teachers are discussed in this study. These factors include teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards motivation and learning, the classroom environment, the type of task or goal, students' individual differences, and the cultural and societal context (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998).

Students with high self-efficacy may respond differently than those with low self-efficacy (Noels et al., 2000). Additionally, the cultural and societal context has an impact on the use and effectiveness of motivational strategies (Dörnyei, 2001; Ruesch et al., 2012). Varying cultural values and expectations influence the types of strategies employed. Another factor is that the type of task or goal being pursued influences the choice and effectiveness of motivational strategies. Different tasks require different approaches to motivation. Students' individual differences (Dörnyei, 2014), such as personality traits and learning styles, also affect the effectiveness of motivational strategies.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards motivation and learning play a significant role in the utilization of motivational strategies (Astuti, 2016). Positive attitudes towards motivation and intrinsic motivation beliefs contribute to the effectiveness of these strategies. The classroom environment is also crucial, as a positive and supportive environment enhances the effectiveness of motivational strategies. Factors such as teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, and classroom rules and procedures contribute to creating a positive environment (Tran, 2019).

Although previous studies have indicated the positive impact of using motivational strategies (MS) in English language teaching and learning, limited research has been conducted to explore the use of MS by teachers when instructing students in VSTEP speaking skills and the factors that influence their instructional practices. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the existing literature on the use of motivational strategies in the teaching of VSTEP speaking skills within private sector contexts of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam.

### 3. Methodology

A mixed-methods design was conducted to investigate the use of motivational strategies (MS) by EFL teachers in their classroom practices and the factors influencing their use of MS. The adoption of this design was deemed appropriate to gain insights into the topic of interest under investigation (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Data were collected through observations and questionnaires, thereby triangulating the data and enhancing the validity and reliability of the research (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

The study commenced with observations, using adapted observation protocols based on Dörnyei's (2001) framework and an adapted version of Tran's (2019) study, to investigate teachers' use of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1). Then, the questionnaire, adapted from Tran (2019), comprised three sections. The first section presented examples of MS implemented in the classroom, while the second section gathered background information from the participants, such as their names, gender, and years of teaching experience. The third section consisted of 37 items to investigate factors influencing teachers' practices of MS in teaching VSTEP speaking, and data were collected using a five-point Likert scale to assess the level of agreement, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Before the main study, the questionnaire was piloted with 20 teachers to ensure the reliability of the data collection instrument (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The reliability of the piloted questionnaire was confirmed through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ), which yielded a value of 0.93, indicating high reliability. Participants in this study were teachers from the private sector in a city located in the Mekong Delta. Two teachers agreed to participate in the observations and 54 teachers completed the survey. The selection of teacher participants followed a purposive sampling technique, which is suitable for obtaining information-rich cases that offer insights into a phenomenon or situation, particularly when the population of interest is small, hard to reach, or difficult to define (Creswell, 2014).

### 4. Findings

This section presents the findings drawn from the observations and questionnaires to answer the two research questions. The findings reveal that the participating teachers in the private sector demonstrated a range of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking to students learning to reach Level 3 of VSTEP (B1). Moreover, five factors that influenced the use of MS in their practices were identified.

#### 4.1 EFL teachers' use of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1)

Two teachers, namely Andrea and Lily concurred with the anticipated observations within their respective classrooms. Their collective teaching experience in the field of

VSTEP speaking skills spanned from one to three years, with Andrea possessing two years of expertise, while Lily exhibited a higher level of proficiency with three years of instructional experience in this particular skill area. Although their familiarity with teaching VSTEP speaking skills appeared to be at an early stage, it was worth noting that their overall teaching background in the English language ranged from five to ten years. The observations of motivational strategies implemented by the participating teachers during the duration of the research were reported by using scenarios. It was observed that the participating teachers used several motivational strategies to motivate students in their speaking classes. These strategies encompassed various actions, including providing tips and test-taking strategies, providing grammar structures and lexicon tailored to the students' proficiency levels, establishing a friendly and conducive learning environment characterized by the teachers' enthusiasm and readiness to offer support, the sharing of personal anecdotes in the classroom, and the provision of constructive and individualized feedback. The following scenarios from the observations depict these strategies in detail.

### **Scenario 1 (Andrea)**

First, Andrea reviewed the previous lessons. In this scenario extract, while reviewing the lesson Andrea established a learning environment. In particular, he noted a test-taking strategy to deal with exam-related pressure by providing the exam scenario when students had to take the speaking exam (OB. Andrea.6.05pm–6.10 pm)

T: *"Those of you who have attended classes, let's review the basic introduction for this part. How should we start our speaking (review test-taking strategies)?"*

Ss: *"In this situation, I personally think that..."*

T: *"Personally. (Smiling and providing instant feedback). Everybody, 'personally.'"*  
(T establishes his friendliness and conducive learning environment)

Ss: *"Personally."* (Correcting pronunciation)

T: *"Now emphasize the first syllable of 'personally.'"* (T provides constructive feedback)

Ss: *"Personally."* (Laughing at their incorrect pronunciation and producing the correct one).

T: *"I personally think that 'option A' is..."*

Ss: *"the best choice because of the following reasons."*

T: *"Alright, that's similar to... If you enter the exam room and at the beginning, it's not starting yet, but you're afraid you might get nervous and forget, then you can write down some notes and refer to them when you speak. However, that's an exception unless I get extremely nervous."* (T shows Ss how to deal with stress and pressure)

Then, Andrea had his students share ideas by asking them to jot down theirs on the board and helped them to complete the sentences (OB. Andrea.6.11am–6.20 am)

T: *"Now, previously, you all brainstormed at home, and now it's time for you to share your ideas. (T writes 'going to the cinema' on the board). So, now I'll choose, why did you choose 'going to the cinema'?" (T invites one student to share their idea)*

Ss: *"Yes. 'To watch films on a widescreen.'"*

T: (T writes on the board). *"'The widescreen has high quality and vivid sounds.' What else?"*

Ss: *"'To have discussions on the same topic after...'"*

T: *"After what?"*

Ss: *"After watching."*

T: (T writes the complete phrase on the board.) *"Now, with these two ideas, what do you need to do?"*

Ss: *"Add a subject."*

T: *"Add a suitable subject."*

Later, Andrea had his students work in small groups. Andrea walked around the class to listen to students' shared opinions, and then provided feedback for each student. It was noted that he spent time approaching students to facilitate their speaking. This extract illustrates one of his actions (OB. Andrea.6.38pm-6.50 pm)

S1: *"Excuse me, teacher."*

T: *"Yes?"*

S1: *"I said, 'I don't choose to choose the cinema.'"*

S2: *"Why 'choose'?"*

T: *"The correct structure would be 'I don't choose to go to the cinema.' However, during the exam, if I get too nervous, I just try to speak... This is the speaking section, so even if I make a mistake there, it's okay."*

S1: (Showing excitement when Andrea provided feedback, then reacting to his friend's remark that he can speak like that)

...

S2: *"What about the structure with 'like,' teacher?"*

T: (Explaining 'like + to V' and 'like + Ving'). *"Alright. 'like + to V' means you enjoy doing something that is good for you; whereas when talking about my hobbies or things you enjoy doing, I use 'like + Ving'."*

### **Scenario 2 (Lily)**

This scenario depicts an example of Lily's personal anecdotes in the classroom. Lily shared with her students about her experience of taking the exam. She indicated some test-taking strategies to do speaking task 1 in the VSTEP exam (OB. Lily.6.03pm-6.10 pm)

T: *"For this section, you will have 6 questions similar to the topic. Each topic will have three questions. And you don't have to answer all of them. If I were to take the test and answer all 6 questions, I would run out of time. For those of you who are working and*

*attending classes, it's impossible to answer all 6 questions. You just need to answer about 4 out of the 6 questions, and that will be sufficient. For example, they might ask some simple questions like 'What is your favorite color?' Can you answer that?"*

Ss: "Yes".

T: "We will answer it as 'My favorite color is green because...' Remember, 'My favorite color is green because it's a symbol of hope.' 'Green represents hope or because it's beautiful'... You don't have to answer in order. You can answer the easier questions first. If question 1 is easy to answer, and then you find question 5 easy, you can answer question 5."

#### 4.2. Factors influencing teachers' use of motivational strategies

Factors influencing teachers' use of motivational strategies were reported from the questionnaire data. First, the *Descriptive Statistics Test* was conducted to examine the mean scores of five clusters, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 4.1:** Mean scores of the five clusters

Cluster	N	Mean	SD
Mean total	54	4.02	.45
Teacher	54	4.08	.56
Student	54	4.16	.55
MS	54	3.98	.61
School	54	3.60	.73
Testing	54	4.27	.64

Table 4.1 indicates that the mean scores of teachers' perceived factors influencing their practices of motivational strategies was at a high level ( $M=4.02$ ;  $SD=.45$ ). Specifically, the mean score of all clusters ranged from the lowest mean score of School Cluster ( $M=3.60$ ;  $SD=.73$ ) to the highest mean score of Testing Cluster ( $M=4.27$ ;  $SD=.64$ ). Thus, all of the Clusters indicated a high level of factors influencing their MS practices.

**Table 4.2:** One-Sample-t- Test of Testing Cluster

	Test Value = 4.5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Testing	-2.56	53	.013	-.22	-.39	-.04

A *One Sample t-Test* was computed to check whether the mean score of the Testing Cluster is statistically different from the test value of 4.5, a very high level of agreement in the five-degree scale. The result in Table 4.4 indicates a significant difference between the mean score ( $M=4.27$ ;  $SD=.64$ ) and the test value of 4.5 ( $t=-2.5$ ,  $df=53$ ,  $p=.013<.05$ ). This means that testing influenced teachers' use of MS at a high level.

**Table 4.3: One-Sample t-Test of School Cluster**

	Test Value = 3.49					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
School	1.22	53	.227	.12	-.07	.32

The mean score of the School Cluster ( $M=3.60$ ;  $SD=.73$ ) was at a critical value of 3.49, a moderate level of agreement on the five-degree scale; thus, a *One Sample t-Test* was run to check whether the mean score of the School Cluster is statistically different from the test value of 3.49. The result shows that no significant difference between the mean score ( $M=3.60$ ;  $SD=.73$ ) and the test value was observed ( $t=1.22$ ,  $df=53$ ,  $p=.23>.05$ ).

**Table 4.4: Paired Samples-t- Test**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Teacher - Student	-.07	.51	.06	-.21	.06	-1.02	53	.309
Pair 2	Student - MS	.17	.52	.07	.033	.32	2.48	53	.016
Pair 3	MS - School	.37	.75	.10	.16	.57	3.62	53	.001
Pair 4	School - Testing	-.66	.88	.12	-.91	-.42	-5.51	53	.000
Pair 5	Testing - Teacher	.18	.55	.07	.04	.34	2.54	53	.014

A *Paired-Samples t-Test* was computed to check whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of each cluster regarding the factors influencing teachers' use of MS. The result shows that no significant difference between Teacher Cluster and Student Cluster was observed ( $t=1.03$ ,  $df=53$ ,  $p=.3 >.05$ ). The results from the *Paired-Sample t-Test* reveal that the most influential factor regarding the use of MS in teaching VSTEP speaking skills among the participating teachers was the Testing factors, followed by Teacher factors, Student factors, MS factors, and the least influential factor was School factors.

The following items of Testing factors (e.g., the highest influential factor) and School-related factors (e.g., the least influential factors) show the detail of factors influencing the use of MS among the participants. Table 4.5 and Table 4.6 indicate the results.

**Table 4.5:** Teachers' response to the items in Testing factors

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
31. I consider testing factors when I teach VSTEP speaking to my students.	54	1.00	5.00	4.17	.86
32. I align speaking tasks with VSTEP standards and criteria.	54	1.00	5.00	4.19	.91
Q33. I create exam-like tasks and activities that help familiarize my students with the real speaking exam.	54	1.00	5.00	4.30	.82
34. I provide feedback on my students' speaking performance based on VSTEP criteria.	54	1.00	5.00	4.37	.76
35. I provide my students with test-taking strategies and tips to deal with difficult questions.	54	1.00	5.00	4.46	.77
36. I emphasize the benefits and relevance of the VSTEP exam for my students' future academic and career prospects.	54	1.00	5.00	4.15	.83
37. I address my students' test anxiety and provide suitable support and encouragement.	54	1.00	5.00	4.31	.77

As shown in Table 4.5, the teachers agreed that they provided their students with test-taking strategies to deal with difficult questions ( $M=4.46$ ;  $SD=.77$ ) and focused on VSTEP criteria to provide feedback on their students' speaking performance ( $M=4.37$ ;  $SD=.76$ ). Moreover, the teachers acknowledged that they addressed their students' test anxiety and provided support and encouragement ( $M=4.31$ ;  $SD=.77$ ) and created exam-like tasks and activities ( $M=4.30$ ;  $SD=.82$ ). Following this, they reported that they aligned speaking tasks with VSTEP standard and criteria ( $M=4.19$ ;  $SD=.91$ ), In addition, teachers reported that they considered testing factors when they taught VSTEP speaking to their students ( $M=4.17$ ;  $SD=.86$ ). Among the items within the Testing factor cluster, the one ranked lowest was the emphasis of the benefits and relevance of VSTEP exam for the teachers' student future academic and career prospects ( $M=4.15$ ;  $SD=.83$ ).

**Table 4.6:** Teachers' response to the items in School-related factors

Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
24. The center administration provides adequate resources and support for incorporating motivational strategies in teaching speaking.	54	1.00	5.00	3.61	.99
25. The center provides support and recognition for teachers' use of MS in teaching VSTEP speaking.	54	1.00	5.00	3.57	.92
26. The center has trained me on how to use MS in teaching VSTEP speaking.	54	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.17
27. The center's leadership encourages and supports the use of technology in teaching speaking.	54	1.00	5.00	3.67	1.13
28. The center provides opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities that promote speaking skills, such as debate teams or public speaking clubs.	54	1.00	5.00	3.48	1.19
29. The context where I am teaching influences my decision to use motivational strategies when teaching speaking.	54	2.00	5.00	3.96	.80

30. I can access appropriate teaching resources and materials.	54	1.00	5.00	3.96	.88
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Table 4.6 indicates that the teaching context ( $M=3.96$ ;  $SD=.80$ ) and the access to appropriate teaching resources and materials ( $M=3.96$ ;  $SD=.88$ ) informed the highest level of agreement in the cluster of School-related factors. Following this, the teachers reported that the center's leadership encouraged and supported the use of technology in teaching speaking ( $M=3.67$ ;  $SD=1.13$ ). The teachers agreed that the center administration provided adequate resources and support for incorporating motivational strategies in teaching speaking ( $M=3.61$ ;  $SD=.99$ ). Moreover, the teachers agreed that the center provided opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities that promote speaking skills, such as debate teams or public speaking clubs ( $M=3.48$ ;  $SD=1.19$ ). Notably, the training on how to use MS in teaching VSTEP speaking was identified as the least influential factor in the cluster of School-related factors ( $M=3.02$ ;  $SD=1.17$ ).

## 5. Discussion

**Research Question One:** How do EFL teachers use motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking skills to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1)?

The participating teachers in the study used a range of motivational strategies to teach VSTEP speaking to students aiming to achieve level 3 of VSTEP (B1).

First, the participating teachers constructed a friendly and supportive learning environment by showing their enthusiasm to their students. This finding supports the studies in the literature (e.g. Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Tran, 2019). One possible explanation for this finding is that the teachers who took part in the study made conscious efforts to cultivate a positive and encouraging learning environment by demonstrating their enthusiasm towards their students. By expressing enthusiasm, the participating teachers conveyed a genuine interest and passion for the subject matter, which likely had a positive impact on student engagement and motivation. The friendly and supportive atmosphere created by the teachers fostered a sense of comfort and openness, encouraging students to actively participate, ask questions, and seek assistance when needed. This finding highlights the significance of teacher-student rapport (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007) and the role of positive teacher attitudes in creating an optimal learning environment for students (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008).

Second, the participating teachers demonstrated that they created appropriate tasks and assigned group work to promote their students' VSTEP speaking skills. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Bui (2007) who found that teachers assigned task challenges and group work could enhance students' motivation. One possible explanation of this finding is that the participating teachers could recognize the importance of creating engaging and collaborative learning opportunities that specifically targeted the development of their students' speaking abilities in terms of

vocabulary, grammar, test-taking skills, evaluation, and pronunciation. In other words, their efforts to use such activities could demonstrate their commitment to facilitating effective language learning and promoting the overall language proficiency of their students.

Third, one participating teacher shared her personal stories associated with her learning and test-taking experience on the VSTEP speaking exam. This is in line with the finding of Lee and Lin (2019) who found that teachers shared their own English learning experience with students to motivate their language learning process. One possible explanation for this finding is that the teacher's personal stories could provide practical insights and strategies for approaching the VSTEP speaking exam. By sharing her strategies and techniques employed during the exam, the teacher could aim to offer valuable guidance to the students, helping them better prepare and perform well.

Fourth, the findings reveal that the participating teachers provided feedback to as many students as possible during their speaking practice. This finding aligns with studies by Astuti (2016) and Tran (2019) who claim that the way feedback was offered enhances students' motivation in English language learning. One possible explanation for this is that the participating teachers could demonstrate their commitment to providing individualized attention and support. This approach could acknowledge the unique needs and progress of each student, aiming to address their specific areas of improvement.

**Research Question Two:** What factors influence teachers' practices of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking skills at Level 3 of VSTEP?

The data from the questionnaire reveal that teachers' decisions to incorporate motivational strategies (MS) in their pedagogy were highly influenced by several factors. These factors were testing, teacher-related, student-related, MS-related, and school-related factors, ranging from the highest influential factor to the least one.

First, the testing factors were reported to have the greatest influence on the use of MS in the pedagogical context of teaching VSTEP speaking skills. This finding supports a study conducted by Tran (2019) who claims that speaking tests influenced teachers' use of MS. This can be explained by the fact that teachers prioritize the integration of MS into their instruction when recognizing the link between these strategies and specific testing criteria and standards of the VSTEP speaking exam. In other words, such an alignment could ensure that learners were well-prepared and equipped with the necessary skills to perform successfully in the VSTEP speaking exam.

Second, the school-related factors were acknowledged to have the least influence on the use of MS among the participating teachers. In many studies, school-related factors were identified to have a direct influence on the use of MS in English classes across various educational contexts, especially in speaking classes (e.g., Lee, 2015; Lee & Lin, 2019; Tran, 2019). Notably, regarding the items in the school-related factor cluster, teacher training on how to use MS in their VSTEP speaking class received the least mean score.

One possible explanation for this finding is that there could be a lack of emphasis or resources dedicated to training teachers specifically on how to effectively incorporate MS into their VSTEP speaking classes. Moreover, this could be due to various factors, such as limited professional development opportunities or a curriculum that places less emphasis on these strategies.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings of this current study provide insightful views into teachers' use of motivational strategies in teaching VSTEP speaking to students learning to reach level 3 of VSTEP (B1) and factors influencing their practices. In light of these findings, pedagogical recommendations for teachers and administrators are made.

It is recommended that teachers are encouraged to incorporate motivational strategies in their VSTEP speaking classes to foster and maintain their student motivation. Moreover, teachers should share their experiences and their best practices regarding the use of MS in VSTEP speaking classes. They should establish platforms for collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, namely teacher forums, discussion groups, or regular sharing sessions, thereby allowing teachers to exchange ideas and successful strategies.

It is essential for administrators to provide ongoing support and encouragement for teachers to ensure that teachers have necessary resources and sufficient time to make informed decisions about which strategies are needed to implement in improving their teaching of speaking. In particular, by providing teachers with the opportunity to attend training programs and professional development workshops, administrators can infuse teachers with how they make informed decisions on what type of motivational strategies needed to promote their teaching VSTEP speaking skills for the sake of the quality of teaching and learning in private sectors.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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